

Providing written corrective feedback on students' writing assignments at IAIN Palangka Raya

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Abstract

Written Correction Feedback (WCF) is an essential aspect of any English language writing course. The study attempts to provide EFL writing teachers with some key considerations in providing written corrective feedback on English language learners' written assignments at English Department of IAIN Palangka Raya. To begin with, the researcher reviews reasons supporting the practice of giving feedback on student' written errors. Next, the researcher presents categories of written errors and discussed different ways of offering corrective feedback. Finally, the researcher summarizes key considerations in giving feedback on student written errors. The number of the participants are 16 students who joined Essay Writing class. Based on the research findings, it was found that there are some errors made by the learners such as Verb tense (34 errors or 10.37%), Word order (42 errors or 12.80%), word choice (27 errors or 8.23%), spelling (53 errors or 16.16%), Article (37 errors or 11.28%), Preposition (59 errors or 17.99%), Pronoun agreement (19 errors or 5.79%), and Comma splices (57 errors or 17.38%). The study found some feedback types such as focused (43%), reformulation (26%), metalinguistic (13%), indirect (11%), and direct (7%).

Keywords: errors; corrective feedback; EFL written assignments

INTRODUCTION

Feedback is an essential component of any English language writing course. Ur (1996: 242) defines "feedback as information that is given to the learner about his or her performance of the learning task, usually with the objective of improving their performance". Other experts define corrective feedback is information given to learners regarding a linguistic error they have made (Loewen, 2012; Sheen, 2007). The goal of feedback is to teach skills that help students improve their writing proficiency to the point where they are cognizant of what is expected of them as writers and are able to produce it with minimal errors and maximum clarity." In my opinion, written corrective

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feedback is the teacher's ways to help students to improve their writing proficiency to produce it with minimal errors and maximum quality.

Until recent years, there has been continuously debate on the effectiveness of written corrective feedback on the development of language. Truscott's claim (1996) that "corrective feedback is 'ineffective' at best and even "potentially harmful" to students (p.328), insisting that such time and effort should be spent on alternative activities such as additional writing practice, there have been a number of studies which have tried to investigate the effectiveness of corrective feedback based on empirical experiments."

Furthermore, Truscott (1996) claims:

"... corrective feedback should be abandoned because (1) it will be ineffective in cases where the teachers' corrective feedback does not fit to students' developmental sequences, which ignores the nature of inter language development; (2) even if it is effective, it is likely to be beneficial only to the development of explicit or metalinguistic knowledge, and it is unlikely to affect students' implicit knowledge or procedural knowledge;...."

In my view, corrective feedback is still useful for EFL learners since it provides information about learners' errors so that the learners can correct them. In other words, feedback provided to a learner should include information about actions for the learner to take in order to determine the correct performance. According to Guenette, (2007) recent years, responding to student writers' errors is a controversial issue and this controversy still rages between the supporters of both options – pro-correction and non-correction – since research has not been conclusive as to whether providing feedback has a significant effect on attaining fluency and accuracy in writing. For years and years, error correction in writing has been a matter of debate among language practitioners and researchers. In my view, I stand on pro- correction side, since based on the experience, learners need teacher's corrective feedback not only for motivating them but also for reducing the errors they made.

Some experts also found some advantages of corrective feedback. For example, Sheen (2007) found that WCF on structural errors that targeted a single linguistic feature improved learners' accuracy. On the other hand, Sheppard (1992) found that the use of holistic WCF on meaning was more useful than surface-level WCF on form in increasing students' awareness of sentence boundaries. Research has also demonstrated varying findings even within studies (e.g., Bitchener, Young & Cameron, 2005; Clark & Ouellette, 2008; Hartshorn, 2008). For example, Clark and Ouellette's (2008) study showed that WCF helped learners somewhat, but was not sufficient to help them correct their errors. They found that WCF helped learners notice that errors existed, but did not help them to identify the boundaries and nature of the errors. By conducting this mini scale research, it is expected that the result can support the above findings. Corrective feedback can help learners in writing. Research has also provided evidence that students often do not understand the meaning of much of the WCF on their papers and also do not know what they are expected to do with the WCF. Ferris (1995) and Hyland (1998),

for example, found that students had problems understanding the WCF provided to them and that often students' use of feedback did not completely match the teacher's intentions. The effectiveness of WCF has also been suggested to hinge upon students' preferences for it. In other words, students' opinions and preferences for certain types and amounts of WCF affect their use of it for learning. Schulz, 2001 give an example, if a student prefers or believes that one type of WCF is more useful, then he or she may be more likely to pay more attention to the correction and use it for learning than if he or she does not believe in its effects. In addition, Lee (2005) adding to the complexity, research investigating students' preferences for WCF has found that students' preferences for WCF vary. Some studies have found that students appreciate receiving large amounts of different types of WCF irrespective of the types of errors on which it is focused. He found that students preferred comprehensive WCF rather than selective WCF, and that students approved of overt correction as well as indirect WCF such as coding.

In addition, reviewing research into written corrective feedback, Bitchener (2012) noted that written corrective feedback can help learners to have better control over targeted structures. Trustcott (1996) stated:

"Most language learners seem to expect some kind of feedback on their writing to at least know what the problems are and preferably how to improve them. Students' expectations alone deserve writing teachers' effort to help them to compose accurately and clearly in another language. The next logical question to ask is what some efficacious approaches to responding to student written errors are."

A number of studies explored the effects of WCF on separate error types, and all reported differing levels of improvement for different types of errors. Ferris (2006), for example, differentiated between five major error categories (i.e. verb errors, noun errors, article errors, lexical errors, and sentence errors), and found that students receiving CF only realized a significant reduction from pre-test to posttest in verb errors. Furthermore, Bitchener et al. (2005) investigated how WCF influenced learners' accuracy development on three target structures, and found that CF had a greater effect on the accuracy of past simple tense and articles than on the correct usage of prepositions. Rather than exploring the effect of CF on separate types of errors. In addition, Storch and Wigglesworth (2010) argued that analyzing how learners actually use WCF could provide insights on how and when learners benefit from error correction. Moreover, Bruton (2009) suggested that detailed, qualitative analysis of learners' writing performance over time might give a more complete and accurate picture of the accuracy gains brought about by CF than the more common global measures. Error and mistake in my opinion have sharply difference. Errors are usually made due to the lack of knowledge. So, the action was wrong because it was different from the rules, model or specific code. Error is a more formal word than mistake. They are systematic and need someone else to repair. Meanwhile, mistakes are performance based, and can be self-corrected. Mistake is less formal than error, and is usually used in daily speech. In writing, it is hard to determine whether the learners do errors or mistakes. In the present study, the learners' mistakes in writing product are regarded as

errors. The study attempts to provide EFL writing teachers with some key considerations in providing written corrective feedback on English language learners' written assignments at English Department of IAIN Palangka Raya. Here, I will classify the learners' errors including some grammatical errors such as verb tense, word order, word choice, spelling, article, preposition, pronoun agreement, and comma splices. Then, I try to give written corrective feedback (WCF) for those errors. Lastly, I will count the number of errors and the number of written corrective feedback (WCF) given to the learners.

There are some experts give definition about WCF; Ducken (2014:211), Written corrective feedback may be defined as written feedback given by the teacher on a student paper with the aim of improving grammatical accuracy (including spelling, capitalization, and punctuation) as well as written feedback on idiomatic usage (such as word order and word choice). Meanwhile, Kulhavy defined feedback as "any of the numerous procedures that are used to tell a learner if an instructional response is right or wrong". For example, Hattie et al. (1996), "providing a student with the right answer would be a simple example to illustrate this definition of feedback. This definition describes feedback as the information provided to the learner regarding his/her actions with the intent to assist the learner to either reinforce correct responses or to search for replacement for the incorrect ones". In my point of view, Written corrective feedback (WCF) may be defined as written feedback given by the teacher on a student paper with the aim of improving grammatical accuracy (including spelling, capitalization, and punctuation) as well as written feedback on idiomatic usage (such as word order and word choice). In the other words, written corrective feedback is the teacher's ways to help students to improve their writing proficiency to produce it with minimal errors and maximum quality. Finally, feedback needs to be provided within a realistic writing context to enable valid assessment of the role of CF in L2 learners' written accuracy development. Long (2007) claimed that development can only be measured by examining language use during unmonitored production, when learners' focus is on content rather than on Corrective Feedback in L2 Writing.

Different with all the studies above, this study attempts to provide EFL writing teachers with some key considerations in providing the types of written corrective feedback (WCF) on English language learners' written assignments at English Department of IAIN Palangka Raya. To begin with, the researcher reviews reasons supporting the practice of giving feedback on student written errors. Then, the learners' errors are identified. Next, the researcher presents a typology of written errors and discussed different ways of offering corrective feedback. Finally, the researcher summarizes key considerations in giving feedback on student written errors.

METHOD

Participants

The study was using content analysis of students' essays. Quantitative data collection and analysis enabled the researcher to understand teachers' practices of

providing WCF types in the teaching of EFL writing and teachers' actual WCF types practice. Meanwhile, qualitative data collection and analysis allowed the researcher to interpret and understand teachers' WCF types practice by looking at the actual WCF remarks provided by teachers to the students' essays. The present study, the written corrective feedback (WCF) being used was the model of WCF proposed by Ellis (2008), namely; Direct, Indirect, Metalinguistic, Focused, Unfocused, Electronic and Reformulation, with two additional types, Personal comment and No feedback.

The study attempted to provide EFL writing teachers with some key considerations in providing written corrective feedback on English language learners' written assignments at English Department of IAIN Palangka Raya. The data were collected in the form of quantitative and qualitative data. The participants consisted of 16 EFL learners of Essay Writing class (6 males and 10 females) with an average age between 20 – 21 years, participating in November 2016 at English Department of IAIN Palangka Raya.

Procedures

The objective of the essay writing course was to familiarize the learners with task of the writing essay, in which learners are supposed to write an expository essay with a minimum number of 450 words. In addition to content, organization, mechanics, and grammatical and grammar lexical accuracy were also emphasized. The classes were held once a week with session lasting about 120 minutes. The first meeting, the teacher explained the process of writing an expository essay, provided the students with model essays, and had the students practice writing essays of their own. An essay was collected by the writing teacher: Tazkiyatunnafs Elhawwa, commented on, and returned to the students in the following session. The second meeting, the students were required to revise their papers and return them to the teacher for a second round of feedback.

Error feedback method

The essays, then, were commented on using written corrective feedback in the form of underlining and coding the grammar errors. The error categories marked in the essays were adapted from Ferris & Roberts (2001) including verb errors, noun ending errors, article errors, wrong word, and sentence structure errors. A detailed description of the error categories used in: (1) Verb errors (VE): including those errors occurring in the tense and form of the verb as well as the errors related to subject-verb agreement. (2) Noun ending errors (NEE): including the incorrect or unnecessary use of plural or possessive ending and/or omitting them. (3) Article errors (AE): containing the incorrect and/or unnecessary use of articles or other determiners (some, any, etc.) and/or omitting them. (4) Wrong word (WW): including all types of lexical errors in word choice or form .i.e. errors arising from the inappropriate use of prepositions and pronouns. This category, in addition, includes spelling errors if they result in a new word with a meaning different from the intended one. (5) Sentence structure errors (SEE): referring to all errors related to sentence/clause boundaries (for example, run-ons, fragments, comma splices), word order, omitting words or phrases from a sentence,

and inserting any unnecessary words or phrases in a sentence. After the errors were classified, written corrective feedback was applied. WCF types studied were by Ellis (2008), namely; Direct, Indirect, Metalinguistic, Focused, Unfocused, Electronic and Reformulation, with two additional types, Personal comment and No feedback.

FINDINGS

Based on the 32 scripts that collected from the first and the second meetings, which were given WCF, were the proof of what teachers have been practicing. It was found that there 328 errors made by the learners such as Verb tense (34 errors or 10.37%), Word order (42 errors or 12.80%), Confusing word choice (27 errors or 8.23%), Confusing spelling (53 errors or 16.16%), Article mistakes (37 errors or 11.28%), Preposition mistakes (59 errors or 17.99%), Pronoun agreement (19 errors or 5.79 %), and Comma splices(57 errors or 17.38%), as described in Table 1.

Table 1. Types of Errors

No	Types of Errors	Numbers	Percentage
1	Verb tense	34	10.37%
2	Word order	42	12.80%
3	word choice	27	8.23%
4	spelling	53	16.16%
5	Article	37	11.28%
6	Preposition	59	17.99%
7	Pronoun agreement	19	5.79%
8	Comma splices	57	17.38%
Total		328	100.00%

Based on the findings above, it showed that the learners committed various errors in writing. For example, the student wrote: *"I visit my family when I had a long holiday"* instead of *"I visited my family when I had a long holiday."* The case of error belonged to verb tense. Here, the learner failed to use appropriate tense. The other learner wrote: *"My town has many beautiful places tourist to visit"* instead of *"My town has many beautiful tourist places to visit"* Here, the learner failed to use word order correctly. The other learner also wrote: *"My neighbor Ahmad is now seventy years old, he always prays five times a day in the mosque."* This is a case of comma splices. The sentence must be corrected as follows: a) *"My neighbor Ahmad is now seventy years old; however, he always prays five times a day in the mosque."* "or b) *"My neighbor Ahmad is now seventy years old. He always prays five times a day in the mosque."* "c) *"My neighbor Ahmad is now seventy years old, but he always prays five times a day in the mosque."* The learner also wrote: *"Palangka Raya and my home town have its beauty of forest."* Instead of *"Palangka Raya and my home town have their beauty of forest."* This is the case of pronoun agreement. Here, the learner failed to use appropriate pronoun.

Based on the findings above, it be stated that the learners committed various types of errors. This result was also supported by Ibrahim Abushihab's study. In his

investigation on grammatical errors in writing made by twenty second-year students at the Department of English Language learning English as a foreign language in Gazi University of Turkey, he found the learners' errors in tenses, in the use of prepositions, in the use of articles, in the use of active and passive, and morphological errors. The findings also dealt with the error categories marked in the essays were adapted from Ferris & Roberts (2001) including verb errors, noun ending errors, article errors, wrong word, and sentence structure errors. A detailed description of the error categories used in: (1) Verb errors (VE): including those errors occurring in the tense and form of the verb as well as the errors related to subject-verb agreement. (2) Noun ending errors (NEE): including the incorrect or unnecessary use of plural or possessive ending and/or omitting them. (3) Article errors (AE): containing the incorrect and/or unnecessary use of articles or other determiners (some, any, etc.) and/or omitting them. (4) Wrong word (WW): including all types of lexical errors in word choice or form .i.e. errors arising from the inappropriate use of prepositions and pronouns. This category, in addition, includes spelling errors if they result in a new word with a meaning different from the intended one. (5) Sentence structure errors (SEE): referring to all errors related to sentence/clause boundaries (for example, run-ons, fragments, comma splices), word order, omitting words or phrases from a sentence, and inserting any unnecessary words or phrases in a sentence. Apparently, it showed that the errors made by the learners varied. The most error was preposition mistakes and the lowest error was pronoun agreement. Due the types of written corrective feedback, there were 328 written corrective feedbacks, which classify into 5 types of written corrective feedback as follows: focused (141 or 43%), reformulation (85 or 26%), metalinguistic (43 or 13%), indirect (36 or 11%), and direct (23 or 7%). as described in Table 2.

Table 2. Types of Writing Corrective Feedback

No	Types of WCF	Numbers	Percentage
1	focused	141	43%
2	Reformulation	85	26%
3	Metalinguistic	43	13%
4	Indirect	36	11%
5	Direct	23	7%
Total		328	100%

Due to the errors made by the learners, I apply some models of WCF to correct the learners' errors. Here I used focused of the feedback. In focused feedback, I gave correction on specific type of error. Here, I focused on providing feedback on some specific structures the students have just learned. Another type I used was reformulation. In reformulation, I corrected the errors to make the language seem as native-like as possible while keeping the content of the original text. For example, the learner wrote: *Generally, Indonesian people eat rice for breakfast.* Then, I revised: *Indonesian people generally eat rice for breakfast.* I also used indirect type of written corrective feedback. Indirect feedback is used to point out the error that a learner has made without actually providing the correct form. Here, I indicated that an error had occurred but did not provide the correction. For example, the learner wrote: *The data is*

taken from observation. Here, I just circled 'is' to mean that the use of is in that sentence was wrong. The other type of WCF I used was direct model. Direct feedback is the provision of the correct linguistic form or structure by the teacher to the student above the linguistic error. In direct feedback, I provided the correct linguistic form for students directly. For example, the learner wrote: *The data is taken from observation*. Here, I revised the word 'is' with are to mean that the correct use of is in that sentence was wrong and should be removed with 'are' since the word 'data' was plural form and must be followed by plural verb. The next model of WCF I used was Metalinguistic. Meta-linguistic explanation included the provision of grammar rules and examples at the end of student work. For some errors, I preferred to use metalinguistic (e.g., subject, verb, object, article, and preposition) in their feedback. Here, I made use of the Metalinguistic comments (e.g. Ww (wrong word), PA (pronoun agreement), Adj (adjective), Adv (adverb) and Con. (conjunction) to correct the learners' errors.

Apparently, it showed that all collected scripts were given various models of WCF. The Focus of the feedback referred to the teacher attempted to correct all of the students' errors. Indirect referred to any kinds of indication, for example, underlining, circling and using of arrow sign. Metalinguistic clues was used by the teacher to provide some kind of metalinguistic clues as to the nature of error. Here the teacher made use of the Metalinguistic comments (e.g. Sp (spelling), T (tense), A (article), SVA (subject verb agreement) and Prep. (preposition).

Based on the research findings, it was found that there are some errors made by the learners such as Verb tense (34 errors or 10.37%), Word order (42 errors or 12.80%), Confusing word choice (27 errors or 8.23%), Confusing spelling (53 errors or 16.16%), Article mistakes (37 errors or 11.28%), Preposition mistakes (59 errors or 17.99%), Pronoun agreement (19 errors or 5.79%), and Comma splices (57 errors or 17.38%). The study found some feedback types such as focused (43%), reformulation (26%), metalinguistic (13%), indirect (11%), and direct (7%).

The findings showed that the types of WCF teachers thought very useful were Focus, followed by Metalinguistic, direct, Indirect, and Reformulation. Finally, the actual practice of giving WCF was made clear through the analysis of the sample essays.

CONCLUSION

To summarize, it was found that there are some errors made by the learners such as Verb tense (34 errors or 10.37%), Word order (42 errors or 12.80%), word choice (27 errors or 8.23%), spelling (53 errors or 16.16%), Article (37 errors or 11.28%), Preposition (59 errors or 17.99%), Pronoun agreement (19 errors or 5.79%), and Comma splices (57 errors or 17.38%). The study found some feedback types such as focused (43%), reformulation (26%), metalinguistic (13%), indirect (11%), and direct (7%).

It is crucial for teachers to be made aware of the available and possible types of WCF to be incorporated in their teaching, as teachers seem to be uninformed about the

available approach to giving written corrective feedback. In future, the courses planning for teachers should also include the WCF methods, where available and possible corrective feedback and WCF types should be introduced and explained in detail, along with other issues related to the giving corrective feedback. The implication of teachers' lack of awareness in the method of giving feedback is an unsystematic, inefficient and very time consuming process of providing corrective feedback. Therefore, it is recommended that the teachers should consistently use a standard set of clear and direct comments and questions to indicate place and type of content feedback. These types of comments and questions should focus students' attention on the content of the composition.

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